

PRESENT DAY IDEAS ON REVOLUTION.

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REVOLUTION is a word used of late more frequently than any other. Its use by many classes of society and in so many parts of the world indicates a general unrest and discontent, the usual precursor of revolutionary movements, unless met half way by opposing and dominating forces in society and in the nation. Once let general discontent get started and revolution will not be long in coming.

Use of the word revolution has a wider application than ever before. There are all kinds of revolution, some good and some bad. It is hard to think straight in the midst of confusion of ideas over the meaning of a word as dominating as revolution. There have been national revolutions all through the past, but now we hear of schemes for a world or international revolution. Along with revolution, instigated by radicals, there is counter-revolution, instigated by reactionaries. Thus it is that devotees of monarchism and absolutism are at one time anti-revolution and at another pro-revolution.

Prolific discussion now exists concerning social revolution, industrial revolution, and even moral revolution and spiritual revolution. Those who support the existing order find revolutionists in abundance—among Socialists of the Left Wing, among advocates of the Soviet system, and among Bolsheviks, Spartarcides, syndicalists, communists, anarchists, I. W. W.'s, and other kinds of radical thinkers and busy agitators. These suspected revolutionists, rightly or wrongly, are looked upon by the intelligencia as of the worst and most dangerous type in human society. It seems as if every man's hand is against his neighbor. There must come a change, is the cry of the majority. The small minority, instinctively, stand trembling, lest their possessions as well as their rights be taken from them. If the conservative becomes more conservative

and the radical more radical, a clash is sure to come and with that, in the ordinary trend of events, a revolution.

We generally think of revolution as a sudden political change; anything sudden in its change is revolutionary. This kind of revolution has been an inevitable condition of the growth of every nation, of the aspiration of multitudes of human beings. The demand for political change of a drastic sort is just as apt to proceed from good men as from those who are bad. At its best it partakes of the character of reform, and reform receives its vitality from something that is ethical.

Revolution, if completed in its purpose and successful in its operation, consists of two parts, the overturning of that which is, and the establishment of that which is new and is to be. Without a new order revolution is stunted, is half-grown. It excites the execration of men rather than their praise. Society under such conditions has failed to complete its revolution around its centre—the centre of human justice; it has rather gone off on a tangent. Society whether of a majority or minority, has not yet gone the round of a complete revolution; it has stopped with an outburst, an explosion, an eruption, a revolt, a rebellion.

Revolution is generally preceded by a revolt or many revolts. The revolts often fail, one after the other, and are accompanied by great suffering, cruel opposition and pitiless blame. In due time, when society is made ready for the complete change, these attempts at revolt pass on into a complete revolution, sometimes with violence and bloodshed but just as often without them.

To discriminate still more closely, rebellion is organized resistance to constituted authority, while revolution is not only the overthrow of one form of government but the substitution of another. Revolution in its ultimate aim is therefore orderly and so far commands respect and secures adherence. Rebellion is less favored, for it seems to lack these good features of a laudable purpose; it is regarded by every government, by every State, as criminal. High treason is high crime. It is natural, then, that men should prefer to be called revolutionists, and not rebels. The taint of disloyalty is humiliating, while boastful professions of adherence to law and order whether just law or not and whether sound order or not, makes one secure from attack, from arrest and from suspicion.

If one examines history more carefully, he will find that re-

bellion, if successful, is the hand-maid of revolution. But it must be successful; if it fails, it is liable to the penitentiary or the gallows. As Andrew D. White once said, "rebellion is often revolution begun; revolution is rebellion accomplished". To be a revolutionist requires great courage, a kind of audacity, for he may be taken to be, not a revolutionist but a rebel. "Nothing so successful as success"; nothing so awful as failure, especially if it be found in the sphere of politics. One can never feel quite safe, till his new schemes of forms of government have been evolved into completion. Until that end is reached, lovers of the old order will persist in their claim, their charge, their battle-cry, that he who opposes the Government—or, in the United States, the Administration—opposes the State, and he who opposes the State "opposes the ordinance of", opposes God. Such an one is viewed as a traitor to his country and in rebellion to God. Should Time be patient and revolution complete its course, it will then be seen that he is the truest citizen who is loyal to the highest ideals of the State, and to the deepest significance of the Constitution, that he is one who overturns the existing order merely because it has strayed away from the best conception of the State and the real interest of the national Constitution.

There is of course, a presumption in favor of existing institutions. Mere criticism, mere complaint, mere talk, is not enough for one who aspires to be a revolutionist within the State. There must be a well-formed plan of getting something that is better, and better, too, for the mass of men and not merely for one's self or one's own group.

Great revolutions have more behind them than dissatisfaction with political theories and practices. They concern society and the thought of men. A government or a monarch is overthrown, when traditions attached thereto crumble away. The thoughts, the customs, of masses of men take on a new shape; the soul of a nation is being transformed by inevitable laws that come in from without, by the force of circumstances. Revolution then partakes of the character of a social revolution.

It was a century and a half ago that a change came about in the social environment of England, the birthplace of modern revolutions in Europe and the Americas. Even in those days there already existed an industrial revolution and a readjustment of wealth. The social changes which were taking place in England

left an impress even on colonial life. In the words of Brooks Adams, "as an effect of the Industrial Revolution upon industry and commerce, the Revolutionary War (of the American colonies) occurred, the colonial aristocracy misjudged the environment, adhered to Great Britain, were exiled, lost their property, and perished". The loyalists in those days were royalists, and belonged to the upper strata of society, to the privileged class in English society. In opposition to them were plain men, tillers of the soil, lovers of democracy. They were regarded by the existing order in England as disloyal and guilty of rebellion. On the other hand, in those days, it was no credit among the Thirteen Colonies to be classed as loyal, except as loyal to principle, to conscience, and to the rights of the individual.

H. M. Hyndman rightly says that "mere political revolts are not social revolutions". To have a real social revolution there must be "a complete change of the economic, social, and class relations" and a "reconstruction of society". This writer therefore claims that strictly speaking there are no revolutions in either Russia or China, but only "revolts". At best, he asserts, there is only a beginning of a true revolution. However, Bolshevik revolution in Russia, different from that which overthrew the Czar or the Kerensky revolution, partakes of social features and deals with industrial classes more than any revolution which has yet taken place among the great nations of the world. The Soviet idea is that of governing by class groups rather than by territorial communities.

In the eyes of many the change going on among all the nations of Europe and in the United States, since the close of the Great War, is so startling as to forebode wide-spread disaster, a day of "tribulations". We are on the eve of the first great Social Revolution. It will surpass the conflict which has just taken place between nation and nation, government and government, and one political theory and another. The class war has already begun.

Others see in the signs of the times the awful approach of the war of the races—subject and oppressed races rising in their wrath against the domineering traits of the governing white race. This, if not guarded against by higher exhibition of justice, would become the most appalling of all kinds of revolution.

Whether a revolution be political, social, industrial or racial, its approach is of the nature of a threat; it creates feeling of alarm. It was Goldwin Smith who said: "Let us never glorify revolu-

tion". For many years it was the French fashion to magnify the French Revolution, at the close of the 18th century, and, as Andrew P. White has said "the consequences were the futile French Revolution of 1830 and the calamitous French Revolution of 1848. the monarchy of Louis Phillipp as the result of the first, the tyranny of Napoleon III, the Prussian invasion, the surrender of Sedan, and the Commune catastrophe, as the result of the second". Thus while some regard the French Revolution as glorious, others regard it as one of the most sinister events in French history. It is hard to see how any one with humanitarian instincts can glorify either the French Revolution of the 18th century or the Russian Revolution of the 20th century. One may look upon them as unavoidable—the decree of Fate—but one can scarcely find pleasure in the misery, pain, suffering, terror, and cruelty which have followed in their train. Would that the changes needed and demanded might come through appeal to Reason, along paths of peace, and in the spirit of humane sympathy!

There are those who are inclined to think, from the sad and awful experiences which take place in a revolution, that no revolution is right, just as they hold that no war is right. Others, and probably the larger number, are proud to call themselves revolutionists, just as the great crowd shout for war. Many are bewildered, in doubt, and wait to be convinced. As a rule it has been often said in the past that a revolution is justifiable, if there are justifiable circumstances. There must be unbearable wrongs, which nothing but violent methods can possibly redress. It has generally been recognized that every man and all people have what is called "the moral duty of resistance to tyranny and wrong". According to the Declaration of Independence, for the attainment of human rights, it is stated that "governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; and (that) whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it."

Some thinkers distinguish between revolution and evolution; they say, "I believe in evolution, not in revolution". Andrew D. White nearly thirty years ago in an address at Michigan University, argued that revolution is within the law of evolution. 'More and more it becomes clear that the same law of evolution extends even through national catastrophe'. "We see clearly that the French

Revolution was but part of the great evolution of modern democracy".

Mr. White then draws a line "between development by natural growth and development by catastrophe". He prefers the former. As an example of the two kinds of development Mr. White cites first the American Revolution. "Evolution by right reason", as urged by Burke and Pitt, failed, and "the revolutionary method prevailed". "Every thinking man will now at least suspect that the evolutionary process—the peaceful development of constitutional liberty in the colonies—their gradual assumption of state and national dignity, would have saved great suffering to mankind and probably in the long run would have produced a stronger republic and a sounder democracy".

He then cites the French Revolution. Turgot "strove to develop free institutions by a natural process". But "the forces which made for progress by catastrophe and revolution" were too strong. "Could the nation have gone on in the path of peaceful evolution marked out by him (Turgot), it is, humanly speaking, certain that constitutional liberty would have been reached within a few years, and substantial republicanism not long after. What weary years would have been avoided:—the despotism of the guillotine, of the mob, of the recruiting officer;—twenty years of ferocious war,—millions of violent deaths,—billions of treasure thrown into gulfs of hate and greed"!

The third example is the American Civil War, a form of revolution. The pacificator was Henry Clay. "He proposed to extinguish slavery gradually, naturally, by a national sacrifice not at all severe: in fact, by a steady evolution of freedom out of servitude." But his plan failed. "Revolutionists on both sides opposed it". The result we all know: slavery was indeed abolished, but instead of being abolished by a peaceful process, involving an outlay of twenty-five millions of dollars, it was abolished by the most fearful of modern wars, at a cost, when all loss is reckoned, of ten thousand millions of dollars, and of nearly, if not quite, a million of lives".

How much more striking the revolution against the Czarist rule which was instigated in Russia as a blow at Teutonic power on the Eastern front. If men can yet think calmly, the intrigues of this revolution, as of the war, will yet be seen as an undesirable process of development, though thought to be a military necessity.

Only by a spirit of moderation on both sides of a controversy can revolution, war and bloodshed be avoided. The extreme attitude in the reactionary, that is, the radical spirit where least expected—the stubborn, unyielding disposition—is as bad as the radical spirit among those who are classed as liberals. When men are hot in debate or are threatened by foes, all thought of catastrophe and human suffering is cast to the winds, and revolution, like a declaration of war, is voted right, sane, necessary. He who says “Nay” is called a coward and a traitor.

At the present time those who oppose revolution and would restrain every revolutionist are of two classes. The one class, a small minority, consists of those opposed to war, commonly called “conscientious objectors”. The other class consists of those who favored the Great War, under orders of the Government, men who stifled conscience and shouted, “My country, right or wrong”. Thus pacifists and reactionaries find themselves in the same company in checking the spread of revolution. It is only surprising that the strongest antagonists of revolution, these conscientious objectors, are classed along with revolutionists by these other antagonists of revolution, the late advocates of the Great War.

Another strange circumstance is that so many of those who in all the nations are turning towards revolution as the goal of human happiness had at heart but little sympathy with the fighting of either side in the World's great struggle for political mastery and military triumph. That is, the opponent of war under all circumstances now aligns himself with the advocate of revolution and the protagonists of violence. Many are the lovers of peace who defend “direct action”.

In a word it is almost as hard to think straight about revolution as about war. The moral principle, the rule of conscience, the dictum of simple right, fails to exercise its authority.

Really the most logical and most consistent are those who look with disfavor both on war and revolution. How comes it, then, that these men and women are decried as fanatics and fools? Is it some strange eccentricity of the human mind that always arises when the mind is inflamed?

Generally the question of revolution is viewed from another standpoint than that of ethics or religion. Even in the realm of religion, the judgment passed is that of one's own conscience or religious theories and dogmas.

Several years ago the writer made a special study of the Sacred Books of all the Great Religions on this one topic of revolution; he went back to the teachers of the Founders of the Great Faiths. Here were men of deep spiritual insight, "wise men of the East"; what did they think of revolution? In the main they discouraged, but never stimulated, revolution. As with war, so with revolution, it may come only as a last resort. Some were opposed to all war as to every bloody revolution. These men may well be our guides today. The spiritual element should dominate all.